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The Spiritual Unity of the Revealed Religions

İLÂHÎ DİNLERİN RUHBİRLİĞİ

By

Süleyman Ateş

Translated from Turkish into English by Abdullah Takım & Holger Brune

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PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

This article says the goals of all revealed religions are alike. All those who believe in God, must turn to Him and live together peacefully in mutual respect and tolerance. Since their God is the same, their goals are also the same. The goal of all believers is to attain the favour of God and achieve the life everlasting.

The author of this article, an Islamic theologian (Koran exegete) from Turkey, has striven for decades for the right understanding of the Koran and Islam.

His pioneering work in 12 volumes "The Contemporary Interpretation of the Holy Koran" has become a standard work in Turkey.

With his scientific works Prof. Dr. Süleyman Ateş has, both by interpreting of the Koran as well as by establishing the principles which the Koran has brought, paved the way for people who want to approach the Koran scientifically. By this new approach he has described the course one must pursue to understand the Koran. In undertaking this he has had to experience the same things that all innovators experience. Despite the reproaches of his friends and the attacks of his enemies he has not given up the principles of which he is so firmly convinced. The scholarly work, which he still continues with the help of God, has caused a lot of changes in Turkey. It is perhaps more to the point, if one puts it like this:

The valuable insights which Prof. Dr. Süleyman Ateş has reached with regard to the explanation of the Koran will be better understood in future.

As to this translation, the first part (3-5) was translated by my friend Holger Brune, who was also kind enough to read the whole translation and make valuable general comments. The second part (5-19) and the rest was translated by Abdullah Takim.

My thanks go also to my former English teacher Manfred Hiller, who was kind enough to read the translation very carefully and make important corrections and comments concerning its content. Finally, I am greatly indebted to my English friend Dr Peter Starr for reading the manuscript. His part too should be mentioned specifically at this point, because his numerous corrections and suggestions have greatly contributed to the improvement of the translation.

Abdullah Takim

PREFACE

Religions are divine messages that show mankind the ways leading to God. The main mission of the prophets who proclaimed these messages to the people is to reconcile them on the way to God, to unite them through a spiritual bond and to make them brothers and sisters. The mission of the revealed religions, which arise from the same source, cannot be different. God, who has sent His messengers, cannot reveal to His prophets messages which contradict each other.

The reasons for the contradictions and incompatibilities which are to be seen in the revealed religions do not lie in the divine messages themselves, but in the interpretations and commentaries which have been written about these Scriptures. In the course of time, through their hair-splitting interpretations, theologians have complicated access to the religions; thus people have turned away from the true nature of their religions. Thereby, the degeneration of the religions began.

If one reads the original Holy Scriptures of the revealed religions one will easily recognize that the objectives of these Scriptures are identical. But wrong interpretations

have distorted the true message of the religions and nationalized the universal message. As a result, time and again, religion has become an occasion for hostilities.

In this article, the divine messages (i.e. the Torah, the Gospels and the Koran) of the three prophets (Moses, Jesus, Muhammad), who were chosen from the descendants of Abraham, will be analyzed, their essential accord will be presented, and it will be pointed out that it is the goal of these messages to reconcile the people on the way to God and thereby contribute to peace and happiness (eternal bliss).

God takes no pleasure in His servants behaving like enemies and killing each other; on the contrary, He loves it if His servants live together in brotherhood and peace. We hope that this article will help the adherents of the revealed religions to resume brotherly and sisterly relationships.

These good intentions come from us, success comes from God.

THE SPIRITUAL UNITY OF THE REVEALED RELIGIONS

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ
وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ:

“Those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabeans – any who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do right - surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.” (al-Baqara (2/92): 62; al-Mā’ida (5/110): 69)

The essence of all the religions revealed by the One God -Allah-, is in harmony. The Torah, the Gospel and the Koran are revelations that confirm each other. Due to the concurrence of their essence the Koran refers to the Holy Scriptures revealed before it with respect, and it invites the People of the Book to obey the commandments of their Holy Scriptures correctly.

The Koran considers the People of the Book (i.e. Jews and Christians) who follow only those parts of their Holy Scriptures which they like, but forget or neglect those parts they dislike, as ungrateful, unrighteous and sinful. On the other hand, it praises those Jews, Christians, and Sabeans who, with the Muslims, observe the commandments and prohibitions of their Holy Scriptures and it emphasizes that they need feel neither fear nor sorrow, and they will enter paradise.

“If only the People of the Book would believe and ward off (evil), surely We should remit their sins from them and surely We should bring them into Gardens of Delight. If they had observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which was sent down to them from their Lord, they would surely have been nourished from above them and from beneath their feet. Among them there are people who are moderate, but many of them are of evil conduct. ... Say: O People of the Book! You have no ground to stand upon till you observe the Torah and the Gospel and that which was revealed to you from your Lord. That which is revealed to you from your Lord is certain to increase the obstinate rebellion and disbelief of many of them. But grieve not for the disbelieving people. Those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Sabeans, and Christians - Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does right - there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.” (al-Mā’ida (5/110): 65-66, 68-69)

In order to show that these three religions, which all have their origin in the Arabian peninsula, are essentially in agreement, the Koran has allowed the Muslims to eat those animals slaughtered and eaten by the People of the Book. By the same token, the Peo-

ple of the Book are allowed to eat the same food as the Muslims. The Koran also allows Muslims to marry women of the People of the Book.

Another passage of the Koran forbids Muslims to make friends with Jews and Christians.¹ However, this ban is restricted by a further verse. According to this verse, the veto refers only to those Jews and Christians who mock Islam and look down upon the Muslim faith.

“O You who believe! Choose not for friends such of those who received the Book before you, and of the disbelievers, as make a jest and sport of your religion. But fear Allah if you are true believers.” (al-Māʿida (5/110): 57)

No nation and no person has the right to declare themselves to be God’s Chosen People and claim superiority over others. The One God is the God of the universe. All human beings are servants of God. In any human society there are good people and bad ones. As regards the Jews, the Koran points out that there are numerous bad ones beside the good ones:

“Among them there are people who are moderate, but many of them are of evil conduct.” (al-Māʿida (5/110): 66) “It will not be in accordance with your desires, nor the desires of the People of the Book. He who does wrong will have the recompense thereof, and will not find against Allah any protecting friend or helper (nobody can protect him from the punishment of God). And whoever does good works, whether of male or female, and he (or she) is a believer, such will enter paradise and not the least injustice will be done to them. Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self (face) to Allah while doing good (to men) and follows the religion of Abraham, the true in Faith? For Allah did take Abraham for a friend.” (an-Nisāʾ (4/98): 123-125)

These verses sum up the essence of Islam. Islam, which is sometimes named the religion of Abraham and sometimes the religion of the Ḥanīfs (those who believe in the One God), rests on three pillars: monotheism, the belief in the hereafter, and the doing of good deeds. The Koran recognizes all those who believe in the oneness of God, and who serve Him alone, to be in essence Muslims – even though they are not called Muslims – and counts them among those people who will enter Paradise.

Whereas the Koran blames those Jews who try to make mischief and kindle war on earth, it praises those who are moderate and follow the commandments of their religion. The Koran does not condemn a whole nation as wicked, it emphasizes that those who follow the commandments of their revealed Scriptures will live in prosperity. The Koran challenges the People of the Book to follow the commandments of their revealed Scriptures in an appropriate way. If they do not obey, they will have nothing to rely on.² The believers, no matter which religion they belong to, prefer those who believe in God and worship Him to unbelievers. After all, the Muslims were sad when, during the Meccan period, the polytheistic Persians defeated the Byzantines who belonged to the People of the Book. But later, when the Byzantines defeated the polytheistic Persians, the Muslims were pleased.³ It does not agree with true belief that monotheistic people prefer infidels to members of another monotheistic belief.⁴

The Sūra ar-Raʿd (13/87): 36 emphasizes that the People of the Book were glad when the Koran, which confirms their own revealed Holy Scriptures, was sent down. For the fact that the new revelation confirms their Holy Scriptures strengthens their own posi-

¹ Cf. al-Māʿida (5/110): 55.

² Cf. al-Māʿida (5/110): 63-70.

³ Cf. ar-Rūm (30/84): 1-5.

⁴ Cf. al-Māʿida (5/110): 81.

tion. The People of the Book, who believed in the One God, confessed that worship belongs only to the One God and one should follow only His commandments. However, the Arabs did not understand the Holy Scriptures of the People of the Book, because it was written in Hebrew. For that reason the contents of the Holy Scriptures was revealed to the prophet Muhammad in a clear Arabic. In this way the Arabs are called to give up polytheism and to serve only the One God.

All the just and fair People of the Book must have been, of course, glad about the Sending-Down (tanzīl) of the Koran. For the Koran has been revealed to convince the Arabs and all polytheists of the basic contents of belief in which the People of the Book believed, and to confirm the Holy Scriptures, not to reject them, but, on the contrary, to protect them and to invite the believers to practise the commandments of their Holy Scriptures righteously.

The essence of all revealed religions is in agreement. These religions have not been revealed in order to incite the believers against each other and to behave like enemies and then kill each other, but to unite them in the same ideal so that they understand each other. The differences between the religions are the product of human egoism.

In Sūra al-Aʿrāf (7/39): 59-93 many of the prophetic narratives are told and their concurrence is presented: all the prophets have called the people to serve only the One God and turn away from other creatures or things which they formerly idolized. However, the rich among the people, particularly those who had become arrogant through their property and rank, tried to hamper the prophets in their mission. However much the prophet admonished them, however much he warned them, the warnings failed. Finally, the unbelieving people, who deserved their punishment, perished through the divine wrath.

يَا أَيُّهَا الرُّسُلُ كُلُوا مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ (٥١) وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

“O you messengers! Eat of the good things, and do right; surely I know what you do. And surely this your community is one community and I am your Lord, so fear Me.” (al-Muʿminūn (23/74): 51-52)

These verses state that the prophets were obliged to eat only those goods which were clean, pure and allowed by religion. Furthermore, they must do good deeds. These commandments, being one of the foundations of religion, were proclaimed by all prophets. Or, to sum it up in my words, the prophet Muhammad received the following instruction (revelation): “O Muhammad, just as we have imposed on each prophet this commandment, so is the commandment which we have imposed on you the same. Oh you prophets! Don't look upon the religious rules and the traditional religion, which the polytheists and the ignorants have devised. Eat delightful and pure foods, do good deeds and worship!” After that it says that all prophets have proclaimed the same principles: “This community (Umma) of yours is a single community: it consists of the religious law to surrender to God and to serve him. And I'm your Lord; so fear me!”

The notion Umma is used here in the sense of religious community whose members share the same ideals and principles.

These are the common elements of all the prophetic narratives even though the details are different. The true reason why the common elements of the prophetic narratives are told is to emphasize that all the religions proclaimed by the prophets are in agreement, and that the various prophets have continued and completed the mission of their predecessors.

If one reads the three Holy Scriptures attentively one will easily realize that the essence of these Holy Scriptures is the same and that all these Holy Scriptures invite the people to serve the One God, to do good deeds and to practise humanitarian service. And from

where then do all these hostilities, frictions, aggressions and wars arise? The reason for these quarrels and wars does not lie in the Holy Scriptures themselves, but in the arbitrary interpretations of theologians. The theologians (i.e., the scientists of religion (!)) have made their own interpretations a condition for religious belief. Thereby they have restricted the people and have sown, against the divine will, seeds of discord among them. Historically speaking, the crusades serve as an example of this. The civil war in Bosnia and the attacks of the Armenians are also a product of the misinterpretation of religion by theologians. These wrong interpretations are so provocative that they split a brotherly nation into sects and can even incite brother against brother. The denominational quarrel between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, which has continued for many years, and the events in Sivas (city in Turkey), which happened a short time ago, show this very clearly.

Although the messages have been revealed in different languages, the essence of the messages is -with regard to the meaning and the sense- in agreement. For the principles of faith proclaimed by all the prophets are the belief in God and the hereafter, to serve only the One God and to do good deeds. Each prophet has tried to explain these principles to his religious community. From this follows that he who has joined any one of the prophets, - on condition that he does not deny the other prophets - also follows the way of the other prophets:

“We make no distinction between any of His messengers (we believe in all of them).” (al-Baqara (2/92): 285)

“But those who believe in Allah and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them, to them he will soon give their rewards.” (an-Nisā’ (4/98): 152)

“Those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabeans - any who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do right - surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.” (al-Baqara (2/92): 62; al-Mā’ida (5/110): 69)

Many verses of the Koran state emphatically that the People of the Book believed firmly that the verses sent down to the prophet Muhammad are a divine revelation:

“Those who have been given knowledge (the scholars of the People of the Book) see that what is revealed to you from your Lord is the truth and leads to the path of the Almighty, the Praiseworthy.” (Saba’ (34/58): 6)

“Those to whom We have given the Book (the People of the Book) rejoice in that which has been revealed to you.” (ar-Ra’d (13/87): 36)

The scholars of the People of the Book knew that the Koran is a revelation from God. The reason for this is that the narratives and principles of the Koran agree with the narratives and principles of their own Holy Scriptures. The People of the Book knew that Muhammad could neither read nor write and that he did not speak Hebrew. They understood and acknowledged that the words which Muhammad received could not be his own, but that he received these words through the revelation. For these reasons, the Koran praises the sensible scholars of religion who confess the truth. In the following verses the attitude of the kind-hearted scholars of the People of the Book towards the Koran is presented:

“Say: Believe in it or believe not, surely those who were given knowledge before it (the Koran), when it (the Koran) is read to them, fall down prostrate on their faces, adoring. They say: Glory to our Lord! Verily the promise of our Lord must be fulfilled. They fall down on their faces, weeping, and the Koran increases their (earnest) humility.” (al-Isrā’ (17/50): 107-109)

“Say: Have you (carefully) thought about it? If it (the Koran) is from Allah and you reject it, and a witness of the Children of Israel has already testified to the like of it (in the Torah) and has believed, and you are too proud (what plight is yours)?” (al-Aḥqāf (46/66): 10)

“Those to whom We have given the Book rejoice in that which has been revealed to you (i.e. the Koran). ... Say: Allah, and whoever has knowledge of the Book, is a sufficient witness between you and me.” (ar-Raʿd (13/87): 36, 43)

“And there are, certainly, among the People of the Book some who believe in Allah and that which is revealed to you and that which was revealed to them, humbling themselves before Allah. They sell not the Signs of Allah for a miserable gain. Their reward is with their Lord. Verily, Allah is quick in taking account.” (Āl ‘Imrān (3/94): 199)

“But those of them who are firm in knowledge and the believers believe in that which is revealed to you, and that which was revealed before you. And (especially) those who establish prayer and who pay the alms-tax and the believers in Allah and the Last Day. To them shall We soon give a great reward.” (an-Nisā’ (4/98): 162)

“When they listen to that (the Koran) which has been revealed to the messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears because of their recognition of the Truth. They say: Our Lord, we believe. So write us down with the witnesses. How should we not believe in Allah and that which has come to us of the Truth? And (how should we not) hope that our Lord will bring us in along with righteous people? Allah has rewarded them for that their saying - Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide for ever. That is the reward of the good.” (al-Mā’ida (5/110): 83-85)

These verses of the Koran praise those People of the Book who acknowledge the Koran as a revelation from God and these verses promise them eternal bliss and paradise. Since in the age of the prophet Muhammad there were reasonable and decent scholars of the People of the Book who acknowledged the Koran as a revelation from God, by the same token there are also today reasonable scholars of religion who read the Koran. It is too optimistic an expectation that these scholars give up their own religion immediately (and convert to Islam). However, it is sufficient for their eternal bliss if these persons accept the Koran as a revelation from God, and that the man who proclaimed it was a prophet, and that they correct their belief according to monotheism as described in the Koran. The Koran wants the people who believe in the oneness of God and worship only Him to support each other and practise divine service together:

“Say: O People of the Book! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah.” (Āl ‘Imrān (3/94): 64)

The Islamic Mystic Imām al-Qushairī (died in 1074) interprets verse 62 of the Sūra al-Baqara: (2/92) as follows:

اختلاف الطريق مع اتحاد الأصل لا يمنع من حسن القبول فمن صدّق الحقّ سبحانه في آياته و آمن بما أخبر من حقه و صفاته فتباين الشرع واختلاف وقوع الاسم غير قادح في استحقاق الرضوان لذلك قال: إن الذين آمنوا والذين هادوا ثم قال من آمن منهم أي إذا اتفقوا في المعارف فالكلّ لهم حسن المآب وجزيل الثواب و المؤمن من كان في أمان الحق سبحانه و من كان في أمانه سبحانه و تعالى فبالحرى ألاّ خوف عليهم و لا هم يحزنون:

“If the origin (source) is the same, but the ways are different, then this is no obstacle for a good acceptance (entering paradise). Because everyone who accepts the signs of the almighty God as true and believes in what God has stated about His own nature and about His [own] attributes can earn God’s satisfaction, even if the religious laws and the nomenclature are different. For this reason He [the Almighty in verse 62 of the

Sūra al-Baqara: (2/92)] says: ‘Those who believe and those who are Jews ...’ After that he says: ‘Any who believe of them ...’ This means: If they agree in the ma‘rifa (true knowledge, knowledge of God), then each of them can expect a good future, and they will receive abundant reward (from their Lord). A believer is one who is protected by God. And those who are protected by the Almighty will have nothing to fear nor will they grieve.”⁵

Al-Qushairī interprets the same verse, which occurs again in the Sūra al-Mā‘ida (5/110): 69, as follows:

بَيْنَ أَهْمٍ وَإِنْ تَجَنَّسَتْ أَحْوَالُهُمْ فَبَعْدَ مَا تَجْمَعُهُمْ أَصُولُ التَّوْحِيدِ فَلَهُمُ الْأَمَانُ مِنَ الْوَعِيدِ وَالْفَوْزُ بِالْمَزِيدِ:

“The Almighty says: If the people reach an agreement about monotheism, then they will be safe from fear (i.e., they will not enter hell and will not be punished) and will receive abundant reward, even if they are different otherwise.”⁶

All the prophets have proclaimed Islam. It is not only the designation (name) for the religion proclaimed by the prophet Muhammad, but ‘Islam’ is the common name of the religion revealed by God to all the prophets from Adam up to the prophet Muhammad. In the Koran, particularly the prophet Abraham figures as the symbol of Islam:

“Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian; but he was true in faith and a Muslim (who had surrendered to Allah), and he was not of the polytheists.” (Āl ‘Imrān (3/94): 67)

“And strive for Allah with the endeavour which is His right. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you in religion any hardship; (follow) the faith of your father Abraham. He (God) has named you Muslims before and in this (Book).” (al-Ḥajj (22/88): 78)

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving were proclaimed (introduced) not only by the prophet Muhammad, these commandments were proclaimed also by the prophets before him. And Abraham introduced the pilgrimage. In the following verses the essential sameness of the revealed religions is emphasized:

شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّى بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ:

“He has established for you that religion which He commended to Noah, and that which We have revealed to you, and that which We commended to Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: Establish the (laws of) religion, and be not divided therein.” (ash-Shūrā (42/62): 13)

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُبينَ لَكُمْ وَيَهْدِيَكُمْ سُنَنَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ وَيَتُوبَ عَلَيْكُمْ:

“Allah would explain to you and guide you by the examples of those who were before you, and would turn to you in mercy.” (an-Nisā’ (4/98): 26)

In the Sūra al-An‘ām (6/55): 83-89 a series of Israelite prophets, who lived in the time after Abraham, is mentioned. First their deeds are praised, then the prophet Muhammad is addressed:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ فَبِهِدَاهُمْ أَقْتَدِهِ:

“Those are they whom Allah has guided, so follow their guidance.” (al-An‘ām (6/55): 90)

Sūra al-Aḥqāf (46/66): 9 says that the prophet Muhammad is not an innovator among the prophets, which means he has not founded a new religion, but the path of his predecessors has been revealed to him, and that therefore he follows the path of this revelation.

⁵ Qushairī, Laṭā‘if al-Ishārāt: 1/96.

⁶ Ibid. 1/134.

Furthermore, Sūra an-Nīsā' (4/98): 125 states that the prophet Muhammad followed the righteous path of Abraham.

Therefore, the Koran does not demand that the People of the Book give up their own religion, but to give up polytheism and to join monotheism. The 'words agreed between the People of the Book and the Moslems' in Sūra Āl 'Imrān (3/94): 64 is the monotheistic principle summed up in the word Islam.

The Koran does blame those People of the Book who have only their advantage in mind and who distort their own religion by their immoral actions, thus turning away from the spirit of religion. However, the Koran does not condemn all the People of the Book. But the Koran does call those People of the Book who idolize their prophet, or maintain that God has a son, or that God exists of three entities, ungrateful towards God; on the other hand, the Koran praises those People of the Book who have remained faithful to monotheism, which represents the source of their own religion:

لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَاتِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ (١١٣) يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (١١٤) وَمَا يَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَنْ يُكْفَرُوهُ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ (١١٥)

"They are not all alike. Of the People of the Book there is an upright community (people) who recite the Signs of Allah in the night-time, falling prostrate (before Him). They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and they command what is right and forbid what is wrong, and they strive with one another in good works. These are of the righteous. And whatever good they do, will not be rejected. Allah is Aware of those who ward off (evil)." (Āl 'Imrān (3/94): 113-115)

The Koran demands that the People of the Book observe the laws of their Holy Scriptures; those People of the Book who observe these laws are praised. However, those People of the Book who know the Torah by heart, but do not observe its commandments, are compared to an ass which carries books.⁷ Sūra al-Mā'idā also emphasizes that one should observe the laws of the Torah, which has been sent down by God:

وَكَيْفَ يُحْكُمُونَكَ وَعِنْدَهُمُ التَّوْرَةُ فِيهَا حُكْمُ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّوْنَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَمَا أُولَئِكَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٤٣) إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا التَّوْرَةَ فِيهَا هُدًى وَنُورٌ يَحْكُمُ بِهَا النَّبِيُّونَ الَّذِينَ أَسْلَمُوا لِلَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالرَّبَّانِيُّونَ وَالْأَحْبَارُ بِمَا اسْتُحْفِظُوا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا عَلَيْهِ شُهَدَاءَ

"And how do they make you a judge when they have the Torah, wherein is Allah's judgement (for them)? Yet even after that they turn away, and these are not (true) believers. Verily, We sent down the Torah, wherein is guidance and a light, by which the prophets who surrendered (to Allah) judged the Jews, and the rabbis and the scholars (judged) by such of Allah's Book as they were bidden to observe, and they were witnesses thereof." (al-Mā'idā (5/110): 43-44)

وَلِيَحْكُمَ أَهْلُ الْإِنجِيلِ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ

"Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which Allah has sent down therein." (al-Mā'idā (5/110): 47)

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ أَقَامُوا التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنجِيلَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَهُهِمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَأَكْلُوا مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَمِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِهِمْ مِنْهُمْ أُمَّةٌ مُقْتَصِدَةٌ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ سَاءَ مَا يَعْمَلُونَ

"If they had observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which was sent down to them from their Lord, they would surely have been nourished from above them (from the fruits of the trees, which are above them) and from beneath their feet (i.e. from the produce of the earth). Among them there are people who are moderate, but many of them are of evil conduct." (al-Mā'idā (5/110): 66)

⁷ Cf. al-Jumu'a (62/99): 5.

As you see, the Koran does not abrogate the validity of the Holy Scriptures sent down before it; on the contrary, it praises them and says that it confirms these Holy Scriptures. Whereas the Koran blames those who have left the way of their Scriptures, it praises those who have remained faithful to the spirit of their Scriptures. In the Sūra al-Aʿrāf this fact is very clearly underlined:

وَمِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَى أُمَّةٌ يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ

“And of Moses' people there is a community who follow the Truth and thereby establish justice.” “And of those whom We created there is a community (of people) who follow the Truth and thereby establish justice.” (al-Aʿrāf (7/39): 159, 181)

All the people who possess a Holy Scripture are invited to unity and brotherhood:

إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ

“This your community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me.” (al-Anbiyāʾ (21/73): 92; al-Muʾminūn (23/74): 52)

Consequently, it is against the divine will to differentiate between the religions proclaimed by the prophets, and to prefer one prophet to another. For this produces no benefit but only damage.

Those people who believe in God, must all turn to Him and live together peacefully in mutual respect and tolerance.

Since their God is the same, their aims are also the same. The aim of all believers is to attain the favour of God. God, the almighty and august Lord, is not pleased when His servants behave like enemies and kill each other; on the contrary, He wants His servants to live together in brotherhood, peace, love, and mutual respect. For He has revealed the religions so that the people should love each other, make friends with each other and thus become happy. What a wonderful Lord, what an excellent Helper is He!

THE DIFFERENT LAW SYSTEMS IN THE VARIOUS RELIGIONS ARE NATURAL

According to the Koran, God has appointed for each community a particular rite and way.⁸ Verse 40 of the Sūra al-Ḥajj: 22/88 says that the monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques are places of worship in which the name of God is praised, and that God protects them. Thus, human beings are given the message that these religions are the same in essence. For the adherents of the revealed religions there is no reason to separate, to reproach the others, to expel them and to maintain that paradise belongs only to one's particular group.

The following verses emphasize that each people has a religion, religious law, Qibla (direction of praying) and a ritual for the slaughtering of sacrificial victims. God has appointed all this:

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنَسَكًا لِّيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ مَا رَزَقَهُمْ مِنْ بَهِيمَةِ الْأَنْعَامِ

“And for every nation have We appointed a ritual, that they may mention (at the slaughter) the name of Allah over the animal that He has given them for food.” (al-Ḥajj (22/88): 34)

لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنَسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ فَلَا يُنَازِعُكَ فِي الْأَمْرِ

“For every nation have We appointed a ritual which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with you on the (religious) matter.” (al-Ḥajj (22/88): 67)

لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا

⁸ Cf. al-Ḥajj (22/88): 34, 67; al-Baqara (2/92): 148; al-Māʾida (5/110): 48.

“For each We have appointed a law and a traced-out way.” (al-Mā’ida (5/110): 48)

وَلِكُلٍّ وِجْهَةٌ هُوَ مُوَلِّيهَا فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ

“And each one has a direction toward which he turns; so strive with one another in good works.” (al-Baqara (2/92): 148)

The scholars (theologians) of the People of the Book believe that God has revealed the Koran, which confirms their own Scriptures and agrees with their contents. The People of the Book who believe both in their own Holy Scriptures as well as in the Koran, which confirms their Holy Scriptures, are rewarded in a twofold way: first, because of the fact that they observe the laws of their Scriptures; secondly, for accepting the Koran as the Word of God. These are people who remain faithful to the spirit of religion, repel evil by good, and who are kind-hearted and generous.⁹

True belief does not consist of empty words. The People of the Book who believe in the Torah and Gospels must, like those who believe the Koran, patiently practise what their belief requires. They have to fight evil by doing good and give to the poor of that with which God has provided them. They shrink from inconsiderate speech. If they meet those who talk inconsiderately they say:

“To us our works and to you your works. Peace be to you! We turn away from the ignorant.” (al-Qaṣaṣ (28/49): 55)

The two Holy Scriptures whose basic content and mission are in agreement teach their adherents these good ways of behaviour which shape the moral characteristics of those who really believe in these Scriptures. Those who do not possess these moral characteristics are no true believers. If we compare the characteristics of the religious People of the Book with the characteristics of the religious Muslims in verses 19-22 of Sūra ar-Ra’d: 13/87 and verses 63-75 of Sūra al-Furqān: 25/42, we notice immediately that those who believe in either one of these two Scriptures possess the same characteristics. This shows that the mission of both Scriptures is the same, and that the aims and intentions of the revealed religions are the same. After the character traits of the Companions of Muhammad are enumerated in the last verse of Sūra al-Faṭḥ, it emphasizes that in the Torah and the Gospels the believers possess similar characteristics, which is to say that religious people have always been bearers of such traits.

THE RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE OF THE RELIGIONS

There cannot be any doubt that the religions sent down by God have influenced each other because there is only One God, who has sent down all these religions. The spirit of all revealed religions is to prevent the people from worshipping any creatures (idols), and to make them servants of God. All these religions rest on three pillars: The belief in the existence and oneness of God, the belief in the Day of Judgement, i.e., in reward and punishment, and Good deeds. The necessary consequence of belief in God and the hereafter is to do good deeds, which means to serve God. In other words it concerns each deed which is done with the world and the hereafter in view.

Divine service also means that men treat each other justly, do good deeds and perform their tasks carefully. Any religion which upholds these three principles is called Islam. The spirit of the religion preached by all the prophets from Adam up to Muhammad is Islam (i.e. the religion to serve God). Strictly speaking, all the religions sent down after certain intervals of time represent, therefore, only the evolution of one single revealed religion. There exists no human community whose religion is not influenced by the

⁹ Cf. al-Qaṣaṣ (28/49): 53-4.

previous revelations (religions). The Islamic religion represents the last and perfect summary of the preceding Abrahamic religion:

“This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” (al-Mā’ida (5/110): 3)

God purified monotheism, which had been founded by all prophets and particularly by Abraham, from superstition and the polytheistic blemishes which had emerged in the course of time, and revealed it to the prophet Muhammad.

Now I want to compare the commandments of Moses in the Old Testament and the commandments of Jesus in the Gospels with some verses of the Koran in order to show the spiritual unity of the revealed religions.

JUDAISM

In the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis 1:1-2, we read: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.”

Furthermore, the text says that God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh day.¹⁰ The Koran describes approximately the same Creation and says precisely: “And He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days - and His Throne was upon the water.” (Hūd (11/52): 7)

The expression ‘rest’ implies that God was exhausted, therefore the Koran classed this expression, in view of the Glory of God, as inappropriate, and instead it chose the verb ‘istawā’, i.e. he took his seat.¹¹

The Ten Commandments of the Torah which were revealed to Moses were also revealed to Muhammad in the Koran in the Sūra al-Isrā’ and in other chapters of the Koran. We read in the Bible: “Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's.” (Exodus 20:12-17)

In the book of Exodus it says: “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.” (Exodus 21:12)

These laws of the Torah occur in the Koran too.¹² The idea of retaliation in the Torah occurs also among the laws of the Koran. However, the Koran changed the restrictive laws of the Torah with regard to meat and thereby it paved the way for the people to be relieved of a burden. The punishment for adultery in the Torah, namely stoning to death, was changed in the Koran into a hundred whip lashes. Both in the Koran and in the Torah alcohol and usury are forbidden. Thus in Islamic law the following principle prevails: “The religious law of our ancestors is also our religious law”.

God, the August, commands His messenger Muhammad to follow the way of the earlier prophets¹³ and He wants to guide the Muslims to the practices of the earlier prophets.¹⁴

¹⁰ Cf. Genesis 2:1-2.

¹¹ Cf. Ṭā Hā (20/45): 5; ar-Ra‘d (13/87): 2.

¹² Cf. al-Isrā’ (17/50): 22-34 and an-Nūr (24/102): 27-31.

¹³ Cf. al-An‘ām (6/55): 90.

¹⁴ Cf. an-Nisā’ (4/98): 26.

In the Torah, in the book of Exodus chapter 24, it says that Moses climbed a mountain in order to meet God and he remained there forty days and forty nights. In Sūra al-Aʿrāf we read also: “And We appointed with Moses a time of thirty nights (in order to worship to me), and added to them ten, and thus the time appointed by his Lord of forty nights was completed.” (al-Aʿrāf (7/39): 142)

The Islamic sources state that before his prophecy the prophet Muhammad withdrew in the Islamic month of Ramaḍān to the cave in the mountain of Hīrāʾ and worshipped God particularly at night. In numerous instances the method for spiritual development is the same: just as Moses, Zachariah, John the Baptist and Jesus withdrew and worshipped God, so did Muhammad, who was destined to follow the way of his predecessors. Surely, their acts of service to God and thoughts have a spiritual affinity, and it seems they exerted an influence upon each other.

It is remarkable that Moses heard the hidden voice arising from a thorn-bush and received the first revelation of God beside a thorn-bush. The prophet Muhammad also saw the hidden angel (Holy Ghost) for the first time beside a tree, i.e. sidrat al-muntahā (lotus-tree), and received the revelation from him.¹⁵

In many verses of the Koran it is emphasized that the Koran was sent down as a confirmation of the preceding Book (the Holy Scriptures, i.e., the Bible), and that the narratives, general commandments and principles agree with the Holy Scriptures since the source of all Holy Scriptures is the same: all of them are revelations of God. We have already mentioned above that the contents of both Holy Scriptures are in agreement.

CHRISTIANITY

As to Christianity, the Koran did not dedicate a Sūra (a chapter of the Koran) specifically to the mother of the prophet Muhammad, but to Jesus and his mother (Sūra Maryam). In this Sūra the miraculous birth of Jesus is related as follows:

وَاذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ مَرْيَمَ إِذِ اتَّيَبَتْ مِنْ أَهْلِهَا مَكَانًا شَرْفِيًّا (١٦) فَاتَّخَذَتْ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ حِجَابًا فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا (١٧) قَالَتْ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِالرَّحْمَنِ مِنْكَ إِنْ كُنْتُ تَقِيًّا (١٨) قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَنَا رَسُولُ رَبِّكِ لِأَهَبَ لَكِ غُلَامًا زَكِيًّا (١٩) قَالَتْ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ وَلَمْ أَكُنْ بِعِيًّا (٢٠) قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هَيِّئْ وَلْنَجْعَلَهُ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَرَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَكَانَ أَمْرًا مَقْضِيًّا (٢١) فَحَمَلَتْهُ فَانْتَبَدَتْ بِهِ مَكَانًا قَصِيًّا (٢٢) فَأَجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَى جِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ يَالَيْتَنِي مِتُّ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مَنْسِيًّا (٢٣) فَوَضَعَهَا مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْآتِحْرَنِي قَدْ جَعَلَ رَبُّكِ تَحْتَكِ سَرِيًّا (٢٤) وَهَزَيْ إِلَيْكِ جِذْعُ النَّخْلَةِ تُسَاقِطُ عَلَيْكِ رُطْبًا جَنِيًّا (٢٥) فَكُلِي وَاشْرَبِي وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا فَإِمَّا تَرَيْنَ مِنَ الْبَشَرِ أَحَدًا فَقُولِي إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ صَوْمًا فَلَنْ أَكَلِمَ الْيَوْمَ إِنْسِيًّا (٢٦) فَأَنْتَ بِهِ فُؤَمَهَا تَحْمِلُهُ قَالُوا يَا مَرْيَمُ لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا فَرِيًّا (٢٧) يَا أُخْتَ هَارُونَ مَا كَانَ أَبُوكَ امْرَأَ سَوْءٍ وَمَا كَانَتْ أُمُّكَ بَعِيًّا (٢٨) فَأَشَارَتْ إِلَيْهِ قَالُوا كَيْفَ نُكَلِّمُ مَنْ كَانَ فِي الْمَهْدِ صَبِيًّا (٢٩) قَالَ إِنِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ آتَانِيَ الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا (٣٠) وَجَعَلَنِي مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُ وَأَوْصَانِي بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ مَا دُمْتُ حَيًّا (٣١) وَبَرًّا بِوَالِدَتِي وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْنِي جَبَّارًا شَقِيًّا (٣٢) وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا (٣٣) ذَلِكَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ قَوْلَ الْحَقِّ الَّذِي فِيهِ يَمْتَرُونَ:

“And make mention of Mary in the Book, when she had withdrawn from her family to a place in the East. So she took a veil (to screen herself) from them. Then We sent to her Our Spirit (Gabriel) and he appeared before her as a well-made man. She (Mary) said: ‘I seek refuge in the Beneficent One (Allah) from you, if you fear Allah.’ He (the Spirit) said: ‘I am only a messenger of your Lord, (I came) in order to give you a pure son.’ She (Mary) said: ‘How can I have a son when no man has touched me, neither have I been unchaste?’ He (the Spirit) said: ‘So (it will be).’ Your Lord says: ‘It is easy

¹⁵ Cf. an-Najm (53/23): 13-14.

for Me. And We will make him a miracle for the people and a mercy from Us.’ And it is a thing decreed. And she (Mary) conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of the palm-tree. She said: ‘Oh, would that I had died before this and had been a thing forgotten!’ Then (the Spirit) cried to her from below her, saying: ‘Grieve not! Your Lord has placed a rivulet beneath you. And shake the trunk of the palm-tree toward you: it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon you. So eat and drink and be consoled. And if you see any mortal, say: I have vowed a fast to the Beneficent, and may not speak this day to any mortal.’ Then she (Mary) brought him to her own people, carrying him. They said: ‘O Mary! You have done a strange thing. O sister of Aaron! Your father was not a bad man nor was your mother an unchaste woman.’ Then she (Mary) pointed to him. They said: ‘How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?’ He (the child) said: ‘I am the servant of Allah. He (God) has given me the Book and has made me a Prophet. And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving so long as I remain alive. And (has made me) dutiful toward my mother, and has not made me overbearing, unblessed. Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!’ Such is Jesus, son of Mary: (this is) a ‘statement of the truth’ concerning which they doubt.” (Maryam (19/44): 16-34)

COMPARISON BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

We want to make a short comparison between Islamic teaching and the teaching of Jesus. Jesus says: “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.” (Matt. 5:17)

To the prophet Muhammad the following was revealed: “Those are they whom Allah has guided, so follow their guidance.” (al-An‘ām (6/55): 90) “Say: I am no new thing among the messengers (of Allah), nor know I what will be done with me or with you. I do but follow that which is revealed to me.” (al-Aḥqāf (46/66): 9) “This day have I perfected your religion for you.” (al-Mā’ida (5/110): 3)

These verses show that the prophet Muhammad was not sent in order to abrogate the earlier religions, but to perfect and to confirm them. Because: what was revealed to the prophet Muhammad does not contradict the previous religions, but agrees with them in spiritual essence. Therefore, there are no contradictions and contrasts between the Koran and the previous Holy Scriptures. Jesus says: “So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matt. 5:23-24)

The prophet Muhammad says: “None of you will have faith till he wishes for his brother what he likes for himself.”¹⁶ “He, who eats and goes to sleep, while his neighbour hungers next door, is not a believer.”¹⁷

Jesus: “But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt. 5:28)

The prophet Muhammad: “And the adultery of eyes means to gaze at a forbidden thing.”¹⁸ “Let not another one follow the first glance, for the first glance belongs still to

¹⁶ Al-Bukhārī: Īmān: 7; Muslim, Īmān: 71-72; Tirmidhī, Qiyāma: 59; Nasā’ī, Īmān: 19.

¹⁷ Kanz: 9/24929. Ḥākim has this Ḥadīth related in his Mustadrak from ‘Ā’isha.

¹⁸ Al-Bukhārī: Isti’ḍhān: 1; Muslim, Qadar: 20-21; Abū Dāwūd, Nikāḥ: 43; Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad: 2/276, 317.

you (you are not responsible for it), the second, however, belongs to you no more (because you looked intentionally, therefore it is a sin)."¹⁹

Jesus: "Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the laborer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart. As you enter the house, salute it." (Matt. 10:9-12)

The prophet Muhammad donated all his possessions, six gold coins, to the poor and left nothing behind for his heirs. His companion, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, prohibited the consumption of any more food than is necessary.

In the Koran we read: "To those who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah, announce to them a most painful punishment." (at-Tauba (9/113): 34)

And in verse 27 of the Sūra an-Nūr it says: "O you who believe! Enter not houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and saluted their inhabitants." (an-Nūr (24/102): 27)

In the Gospel according to St Matthew it says: "Then the disciples came and said to him: 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' And he answered them: 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ... This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them'." (Matt. 13:10-11, 13, 15)

In the Sūra al-Aʿrāf, the unbelievers who have not understood the value of the Koran are characterized as follows: "They have hearts with which they understand not, they have eyes with which they see not, they have ears with which they hear not." (al-Aʿrāf (7/39): 179)

Sūra al-Isrāʾ (17/50): 46 states that veils have been placed over the hearts of the unbelievers and deafness is in their ears.

In the Bible it says: "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." (Luke 3:11)

The prophet Muhammad says: "He who has an extra mount should give that to one who has no mount for him, and he who has surplus of provisions should give it to him who has no provisions." The companion of the Prophet who related this saying added: "He (the Prophet) made mention of many kinds of wealth until we were of the opinion that none of us had any right to claim a surplus."²⁰

In Sūra al-Māʿūn a show of piety is mentioned as a mark of the unbelievers.²¹ In Sūra Tā Hā it says: "And strain not thine eyes in longing for the things We have given for enjoyment to groups of them, the splendour of the life of this world, through which We test them. The provision of your Lord is better and more lasting. And enjoin upon your family worship, and be constant therein. We ask not of you provisions: We provided for you. And the (good) end is for righteousness." (Tā Hā (20/39): 131-132)

Sūra Hūd (11/52): 6 states that God provides for the sustenance of all creatures on earth.

In the Gospel according to St Matthew 16: 25-27 it says: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give

¹⁹ Tirmidhī, Adab: 28.

²⁰ Cf. Muslim: Luqāṭa: 4290.

²¹ Cf. al-Māʿūn (107/17): 6.

in return for his life? For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done.”

In our opinion Jesus uses the word ‘father’ in the sense of Lord (rabb), who protects his creatures and educates them.

In Sūra ash-Shu‘arā’ (26/62): 88-89 it says: “The day when wealth and sons avail not (any man), except him who brings to Allah a sound heart.”

In the Gospel according to St Matthew it says: “You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honour your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself. ... If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. ... Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matt. 19:18-24)

In Sūra al-Isrā’ (17/50): 23-34 it says: “Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and (that you show) kindness to parents. ... Give the kinsman his due, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and do not squander wastefully. ... And let not your hand be chained to your neck (be not miserly) nor open it with a complete opening (be not wastefully), so that you become blameworthy and destitute. ... Kill not your children for fear of poverty. ... And come not near to adultery. It is a shameful and an evil way. And kill not the life, which Allah has forbidden, except with right. ... Come not near the wealth of the orphan except in a goodly way ... and keep your promises; for you will have to account for them.”

In Sūra al-A‘rāf (7/39): 40 it says: “To those who deny Our Signs and treat them with arrogance, for them the gates of heaven will not be opened, nor will they enter the Paradise until the camel goes through the needle's eye.”

In the Gospel according to St Mark it says: “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin. For they had said: He has an unclean spirit.” (Mark 3:28-30)

These verses in the Gospel according to St Mark underline emphatically: associating any idols as partners with God or to say that other deities exist beside God is an unpardonable sin.

The Koran expresses the same fact as follows: “Allah forgives not that a partner should be ascribed to Him; but He forgives anything else, to whom He will. Whoever ascribes partners to Allah, he has indeed invented a tremendous sin.” (an-Nisā’ (4/98): 48).

As you see, some teachings of the Torah and the Gospels are similar to the teachings of the Koran and the Ḥadīth (sayings of the prophet Muhammad). Sometimes they are even identical. However, this does not mean that the prophet Muhammad read these Scriptures and took over what he found there. No, on the contrary, he could neither read nor write, nor did he know languages like Hebrew, Aramaic and Latin, in which those Scriptures had been written. However, this religious knowledge was put into practice among some Christian Arabs and transmitted orally. Thereby the content of some passages of the Holy Scripture became known in some circles of the Arabic society. Furthermore one should not forget that in cities like Madīna and Khaibar Jewish tribes lived among the Arabs. Egypt was the centre of the Christian Arians, who were monotheists and ascetics. The monks were the focus of interest for the believers. Some Arabs envied these monks and withdrew like these monks and worshipped God. These people were called Ḥanīfs. Before Islam came, the prophet Muhammad was also one of these Ḥanīfs.

Islam, which emerged out of this atmosphere, abolished the extreme points of the previous religions, stressed those principles of these religions which did not contradict monotheism and which were useful for society, and it prohibited those aspects which were not compatible with monotheism. Just as the Koran and the Ḥadīth contain the essence of the earlier Holy Scriptures, Islamic Asceticism and Sufism contain also the asceticism and mysticism of the former religions.

The Koran was not taken over by the other Holy Scriptures, but the essence of the other Holy Scriptures was revealed through the inspiration of the Angel (Gabriel) to the prophet Muhammad in clear Arabic.

According to Badawī, in Ḥīra, Kūfa, Dimashq and Najrān, and particularly in some tribes like Taghlib, Quḍāʿat and Tanūḥ, the Muslims lived together with Christians. In these tribes Christianity was predominant before and after the rise of Islam. According to the reports of ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn Zayd and Abū Sulaimān ad-Dārānī, some of the first Islamic Sufis met with Christian monks and sought advice from them in religious matters.²²

The first Islamic Sufis, who understood the wide spiritual dimension and tolerance of Islam well, and who were therefore far from religious egoism, were not afraid of speaking with other ascetics and virtuous people who were adherents of another religion in order to draw profit from them. They said: "We all have the same aim, only the tradition is different"; by saying this they expressed that the aim of the ascetics and the true believers is the same, but the ways leading to this aim can be different. The ways to God are as numerous as the breaths taken by His creatures. God, the Almighty, says: "And those who strive in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to Our paths." (al-ʿAnkabūt (29/85): 69). A poet has expressed this nicely in Persian:

که مُعتکف دیرم که ساکن مسجد یعنی که ترا می طلبم خانه بخانه

"Sometimes I withdraw to the church, sometimes I stay in the mosque. To find You behind each door, my God, is my religion."

Because of the spiritual agreement of the revealed religions some of the first Islamic Sufis met with sincere Christian monks, talked with them and adapted their wisdom to their environment. The shining model of the Sufis (Islamic mystics), Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, tells us: "I learned the knowledge of God from a monk whose name was Samʿān. I went to see him in his cell and asked him: 'Samʿān, how long have you lived in this cell of yours?' He replied: 'For seventy years.' And what do you eat?" 'O Ḥanīf, what makes you ask that?' 'I should very much like to know.' 'Well, then, one pea every night.' 'And what is it that fortifies your soul so that you can satisfy your hunger with one single pea?'

'Do you see the monastery over there?' 'Yes.' 'Once every year the monks come to me, decorate my cell, walk around it in procession and honour me. Every time my soul becomes lethargic and slow in its devotions I recall this particular occasion. And thus I gain strength to endure one year of effort for that one moment of glory. O Ḥanīf, you too must seek to endure a moment of effort for eternal bliss.' Thus he poured into my heart reverence for divine knowledge. Finally he said: 'Have you received enough, or do you ask for even more?' 'I desire more.' 'Descend from the cell.' I descended from the cell. Then he gave me a bag containing twenty peas and told me: 'Go down to the monastery. They have seen what I have given you.' I went and when I had entered the monastery, the Christians gathered around me and said: 'O Ḥanīf, what has the Sheikh (hermit) given to you?' 'Some of his food.' 'What are you going to do with it? We

²² Cf. Badawī, Abdarraḥmān: Tārīkh at-taṣawwuf al-islāmī. Kuwait 1978, pp. 33-34.

have a greater right to it than you. State your price!’ ‘Twenty dinars.’ And so they paid me twenty dinars, whereupon I returned to the old man, who asked: ‘What have you done with the peas?’ ‘I sold them.’ ‘For how much?’ ‘For twenty dinars.’ ‘You have made a great mistake. If you had asked twenty thousand, they would have paid you that much. Lo, such great glory has a man who does not serve Him. Imagine then the glory that must belong to him who truly serves God. Turn, O Ḥanīf, completely towards your Lord and stop this coming and going’.”²³

Hujwīrī, the great mystical writer, relates this anecdote from Ibrāhīm Khawwās: “Once I heard that in Rūm (Anatolia) there was a monk who had been in a monastery for seventy years. I said to myself: ‘Wonderful! Forty years is the term of monastic vows: what is the state of mind of this man that he has locked himself up there for seventy years?’ I went to see him. When I approached, he opened a window and said to me: ‘O Ibrāhīm, I know why you have come. I have not stayed here for seventy years because of monastic vows, but I have a dog (nafs) foul with passion, and I have taken my abode in this monastery for the purpose of guarding the dog, and preventing it from doing harm to others. I am not that sort of man that you deem to see.’ On hearing him say this I exclaimed: ‘O Lord, You are great. You have power to bestow righteousness on a man even though he is steeped in sheer error.’ He said to me: ‘O Ibrāhīm, how long will you seek other men? Go and seek yourself, and when you have found yourself keep watch over yourself, for this sinful passion (nafs) clothes itself every day in three hundred and sixty diverse garments of godhead and leads men astray’.”²⁴

Sha‘rānī says in his biography of the Islamic Mystics that Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Uṣaifīr reached the supreme degree of the holiness (wilāya) and often slept in a church. Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Uṣaifīr said: “The Christians, like the Muslims, steal no shoes standing in front of (outside) the church.” “True fasting means that one eats no mutton, like the Christians. In my opinion, the fasting of the Muslims who eat mutton and chicken on the day of fasting is not valid.”²⁵

Sha‘rānī relates that he took part in the conversations of Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Uṣaifīr, who died in 1535 (924 H.), and that this person expressed himself in many paradoxical sayings (shaṭḥīyāt) which ran counter to common sense. Furthermore, he notes that Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Uṣaifīr had a deep affection for him and valued him highly. Finally, Sha‘rānī enumerates some miracles of Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Uṣaifīr.²⁶

According to the tradition of Abū Nu‘aim, one person asked ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Faraj: “How can the monks be able to speak wisdom, although they are not Muslims? ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Faraj answered: That is the result of hunger.”²⁷

We read the following verses in the concluding chapter of the book of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusain al-Barjalānī: “Look at the exhortations of the monks, as well at their deeds; A commandment of truth, even if it comes from the mouths of unbelievers. These exhortations cure us, we profit from them, even if they come from the mouth of unbelievers. These words are good exhortations, so that they serve as an example for the soul and leave them alone in the graves (burial places) speechless with a lamentation!

²³ Al-Ghazzālī: *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm ad-dīn* (V. 3), Kitāb al-jāh, p. 518; *Talbīs Iblīs*, pp. 147-148. The English translation, with slight textual and syntactical alterations, is based on “*Andrae, Tor: In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in Early Islamic Mysticism. Transl. from the Swedish by Birgitta Sharpe. Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York Pr., 1987*”, pp. 12-13.

²⁴ Kashf al-mahjūb, Bairūt: Dār an-nahḍa, p. 439. The English translation, with slight textual and syntactical alterations, is based on “*al-Hujwīrī: Kaṣf al-mahjūb. The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism. Transl. by Reynold A. Nicholson. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1911*”, pp. 207-208.

²⁵ Sha‘rānī, *Ṭabaqāt*: 127.

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 126-127.

²⁷ *Ḥilya al-auliya’*: 10/151.

These are such good exhortations that grief wells from the heart if the soul deviates from them. O, you sage, if you are wise, try to understand them, for your next visitor will be death.”²⁸

These accounts (traditions) show that the first Sufis had no scruples about meeting with Christian monks, speaking with them and relating the spiritual advice and instruction they received from those pious men and ascetics who had surrendered to God. According to the great Sufis, who knew that God is the Lord of all worlds and that His mercy encompasses all His creatures, the goal of all people and the essence of the religions is the same, even though the ways are different. Has not the Koran invited all adherents of the revealed religions to this agreement and essential unity?

“Say: O People of the Book! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah.” (Āl ‘Imrān (3/94): 64)

The great Islamic mystic, Mevlānā, who was inspired by the spirit of the Koran, invited all human beings to this unity and brotherhood:

بازا باز هر چه را هستی باز	گر کافر و گبر و بتپرستی باز
این درگاه ما درگاه نومیدی نیست	صد هزار توبه شکستی باز

“Come, come, whoever you are, come!
Come, if you are also an unbeliever, a fire-worshipper or a polytheist!
This our path is not a hopeless one.
If you have regretted also one hundred thousand times, come!”

²⁸ Ibid. 10/151.